HINDUISM BOOKLETS SERIES—NO. 7
(1. Religion—Sl.No. 5)

SYMBOLISM OF OM
AND
THE GAYATRI-MANTRA



SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

SPHOTA, OM, AND NADA-BRAHMAN

Brahmā or Hiranyagarbha or the Cosmic Mind first manifested as the Name, and then as Form, i. e. as this Universe. All this expressed sensible universe is the form, behind which stands the eternal inexpressible SPHOTA, the Manifester, as LOGOS or WORD. This eternal *Sphota*, the essential eternal material of all ideas or names, is the power through which the Lord creates the universe ; nay, the Lord first becomes conditioned as the *Sphota* and then evolves Himself out as the yet

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SYMBOLISM OF OM (AUM) AND THE GĀYATRĪ-MANTRA

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

Acharya, Monastic Probationers Training Centre
Ramakrishna Math and Mission
H. Q. Belur Math (Via Calcutta), India—711-202

"Verily beginninglessly BRAHMAN ALONE IS. OM (The Word) is **Shabda-Brahman** (Brahman in the form of **The Word**). OM is the **Vāchaka** (Designation) of **Brahman**. The whole **Brahmānda** (Cosmic Universe) is a projection of OM. Verily God, gods and goddesses, and all life and all this **Cosmic Universe** is OM alone. There is nothing that exists outside its projection. Its further glory is this : the past, the present, the future—everything is just OM. And whatever transcends the three divisions of time that too is just OM. For truly, everything is Brahman, **And this Self within (Ātman) is Brahman.**"

—RISHI-VĀNI (WORDS OF THE RISHIS)



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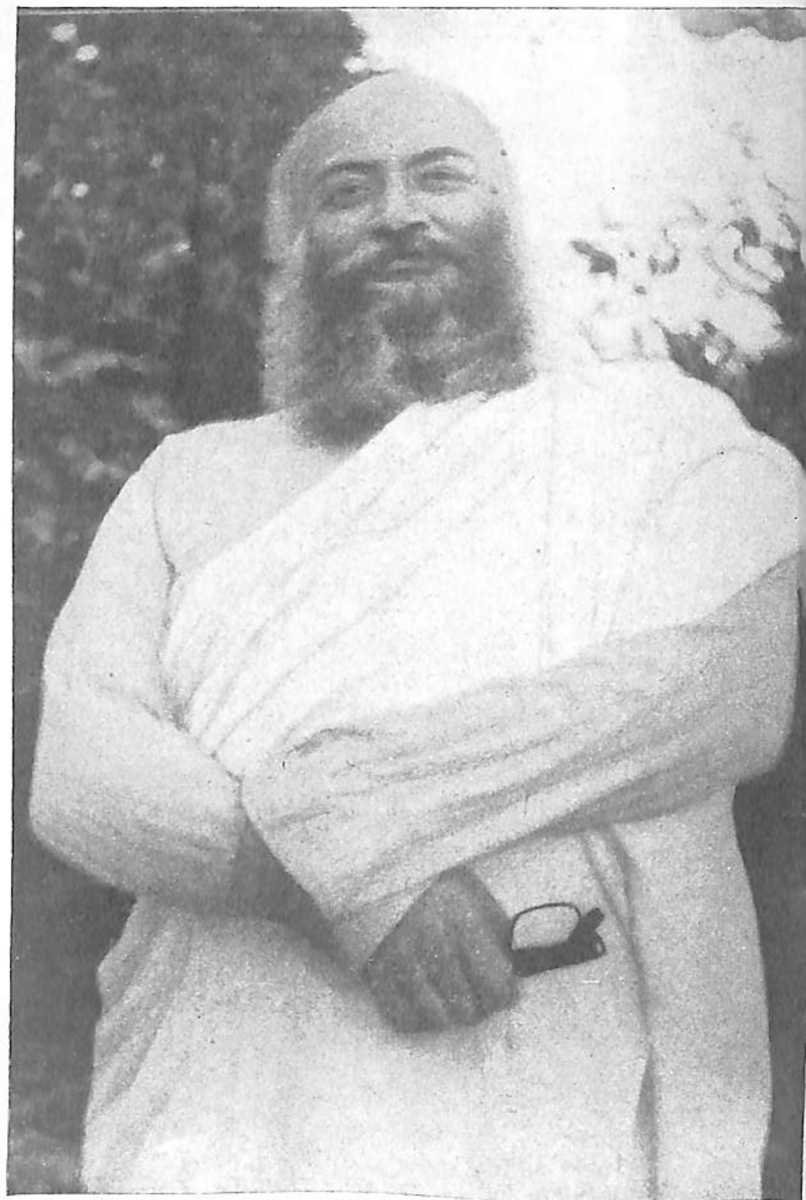
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OM AUM



SWAMI MUKHYANANDAJI
(At Belur Math—Oct. 1978)

SYMBOLISM OF OM (AUM) AND THE GĀYATRĪ-MANTRA

1. The Total Existential Reality

OM OR AUM is the most comprehensive, universal, non-personal, holy Sound-Symbol (LOGOS) and Designation (*Vāchaka*) of the SUPREME INFINITE DIVINE REALITY. This *Divine Reality* is of the nature of ANANTA-SAT-CHIT-ĀNANDA (**Absolute** INFINITE-EXISTENCE-CONSCIOUSNESS-BLISS). It manifests as the *Totality of Existence*—from the external-most Physical to the internal-most Spiritual—on Four Cosmic Planes, *Macrocosmic* (Universal) as well as *Microcosmic* (Individual), viz.—

1. The Gross or Physical ;
2. The Subtle or Psychical ;
3. The Potential or Causal ; and
4. The Transcendental or Meta-Phenomenal, which is the Source of the first three.

The first Three Planes are represented on the Cosmic level, respectively, by :

1. Our external physical or empirical universe of sense-experience with its different types of life, such as microbes, plants, fishes and birds, animals, and human beings experienced while living through the Gross-body—designated BHŪH or BHŪR-LOKA ;
2. The intermediate subtle regions with the Manes and other subtle invisible beings inhabiting them, which are apprehended psychically while living or through the Subtle-body after death —designated BHUVAH or BHUVAR-LOKA ;
3. The several heavens with the different types of angels and gods residing in them, including the Highest Heaven called the *Abode of Truth* (SATYA-LOKA) where dwells the SUPREME CREATOR-GOD (BRAHMĀ), to be envisioned spiritually while living in *Samādhi* or Trance, or through the Spiritual-body after death—designated SVAH or SVAR-LOKA.

These *Three Planes* (TRI-BHUVANA) together constitute the entire phenomenal universe,

called the BRAHMĀNDA. The Supreme Being and Universal Oversoul of the entire *Brahmānda* and all its beings is designated PARAMA-ĪSHVARA (THE SUPREME LORD AND RULER). *Parama-Īshvara (Parameshvara)* rules this *Brahmānda*, divided into *Fourteen Cosmic Worlds* (CHATURDASHA-BHUVANA-s or LOKA-s), from within *(Antaryāmin)* permeating it as its OVERSOUL (PARAMĀTMAN).

Beyond the Phenomenal *Brahmānda* is the Noumenal, Non-Personal, Transcendental Absolute SPIRITUAL REALITY designated BRAHMAN (THE INFINITE), which is *Supra-Corporeal*, Meta-Physical, and beyond all Worlds and Heavens (LOKOTTARA). That is the FOURTH PLANE (TURĪYA), *the Absolute* beyond all Time, Space, and Causation. *IT is pure infinite Spiritual Existence, and not any Region or Person.* All the other Three Planes are *Relative*. They are within time, space, and causation and rest on the Fourth, their Source, like a cinema-show on the screen without affecting IT. It is the ABSOLUTE BRAHMAN that appears as *Parameshvara* when associated with the *Brahmānda*, the entire Phenomenal Universe of the Three Planes.

II. The Macrocosm and the Microcosm

THE MACROCOSM, which is represented by all the above Four Cosmic Planes, and the MICROCOSM, the individual unit which is a part of it, are built on the same plan, just as the fully manifested tree with its trunk and branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits, bears also seeds, each of which contains within itself the potentiality of manifesting a similar whole tree, including similar seeds. Though the seeds are for the time being a very minor part of the tree, without any similarity to it, all the elements and ingredients of the whole tree are lying latent within every seed though invisible. Similarly, each individual being or person, though apparently an insignificant part of the *Brahmānda*, contains the potentiality of the entire Four Planes of Existence of ANANTA-SAT-CHIT-ĀNANDA, which he or she can manifest in due course through spiritual efforts *(Sādhanā)* and find affinity and unity *(Yoga)* on each Cosmic Plane through identification with it. Hence, as a corollary to *Brahmānda*, the individual is called the *Pindānda (Anda* means egg, which has the potentiality of reproducing its original source).

It will be interesting to note that from the Vedic literature onwards, in the Upanishads, the *Gītā*, and the later literature, the Supreme Divine Reality BRAHMAN is referred to as the Eternal Empyrean Source in which *the Tree of the Universe,* called ASHVATTHA (literally, 'that which will not last till tomorrow', that is, ever-changing and ephemeral), is rooted.[1] Sometimes, the Divine Reality Itself along with the universe, is referred to as THE ETERNAL TREE, since the universe is rooted in IT (*SAT-mūlāh saumya imāh sarvāh prajāh-Sat-āya, tanāh, Sat-pratishthāh—Chhāndogya Upanishad,* VI. 8. 4),[2] and continuously manifests from the Reality, like the waves in the ocean, while the Reality remains unseen. The *Katha Upanishad* (VI. 1) says : "This is the Eternal *Ashvattha Tree* whose roots are above and whose branches spread below. That is verily the Pure, That is Brahman, and That is also called the Immortal. In That rest all the worlds, and none can transcend IT. Verily this is THAT." Cf. Also *Shvetāshvatara Upanishad,* III. 9 :

"Rooted in His own glory He stands like a *Tree,* One without a second and immovable. By that Being the whole universe is filled."

(Vriksha iva stabdho divi tishthati ekah ; tenedam pūrnam purushena sarvam.)

Gītā, XV. 1-3 says: They speak of an Eternal *Ashvattha* rooted above and branching below whose leaves are the Vedas......

It was stated above that whatever is in the Macrocosm in a fully developed form is also in the Microcosm potentially in the seed-form, though unseen. Conversely, we may also surmise that whatever latent intellectual and artistic faculties are manifested and developed in the Microcosm in course of time or evolution are already present in the Macrocosm in a fully developed state, though ordinarily invisible to us.[3] That is, we cannot comprehend them without proper mental equipment, training, and attuning ourselves to it. But the Yogi-s with disciplined and trained minds visualize them (*Yogi-pratyaksha)*, just as ordinarily we cannot see with bare eyes what the astronomers see about the far away galaxies, nebulae, etc. with the help of powerful telescopes. Cf. a) *Tad-vishnoh paramam padam sadā pashyanti sūrayah ; divi-iva chakshuh ātatam—Rig-veda, I. 22.20 ; also b) Esha sarveshu bhuteshu gūdho ātmā na prakāshate ; drishyate tu*

agryayā buddhyā sūkshmayā sūkshma-darshibhih, —*Katha Upanishad,* III. 12).[4]

On the Microcosmic level, in the individual person, the corresponding States of the Four Cosmic Planes are :

1. The Gross or Physical-Body *(Sthūla-Sharīra*) of the Waking-State *(Jāgrat)*, operative while living, which is an integral part of our entire physical universe of sense-perception (*Bhūh*) ;

2. The Subtle or Psychic-Body (*Sūkshma-Sharīra*), experienced psychically and to some extent in the Dream-State (*Svapna*), which survives death of the Gross-body and is an integral part of the Cosmic Psychic-Plane (*Bhuvah*) ;

3. The Potential or Causal-Body (*Kārana-Sharīra*) , experienced as the formless and objectless pure peaceful happiness in the dreamless Deep-Sleep-State (*Sushupti*) , when both the Gross-body and the Subtle-body are held in abeyance, and which lasts till the real Self-Knowledge dawns. It is equivalent to the State of Involution (*Prati-sarga*) of *Brahmānda* when it returns by the reverse process into its Causal or Seed-State (*Pralaya*) after billions of

billions years. From that Seed-State again the Evolution (*Sarga*) of the next universe commences after a long period of dynamic rest, just as we commence our next day after sleep.

In the different categories of Spiritual-States experienced in different types of Trances and *Samādhi-s*, when one envisions angels, gods, and the Supreme Personal Creator-God and has intercourse with them, the Causal-Body, having been purified and rendered subtler and transparent (*Sāttvika*) by spiritual *Sādhanā*, manifests as Spiritual-Body (*Sāttvika-Sharīra*) or Divinized-Body (*Bhagavatī-Tanu*), which is an integral part of the Cosmic Heavens (*Svah*).

These three are the Phenomenal States of the individual person, corresponding to the Phenomenal Universe. The Spiritual Entity within the person which endows the body with personality and consciousness, enabling it to get all the experiences of life in all the States, is called the JĪVA or JĪVĀTMAN (ANIMATING-SOUL). *Jīvātman* is the lord and ruler of the body and controls and guides it from within, even as PARAMĀTMAN controls the universe from within.[5]

4. The Fourth Plane *(Turīya)* on the individual level is the Absolute ĀTMAN, corresponding to Absolute BRAHMAN, realized only in *Nirvikalpa-Samādhi* (Transcendental Trance when the mind merges in the SPIRIT, its Source), beyond all manifested and potential corporeality. It is the ABSOLUTE ĀTMAN which appears as the JĪVA when associated with individual beings. The individual personality and life rest on the *Ātman* like the cinema-show on the screen without affecting IT. On this plane ĀTMAN is identical with BRAHMAN, since it is a plane beyond all phenomena, beyond *Brahmānda,* where there is no Time, Space, or Causation to bring about division or limitation in any manner in *the Pure Infinite Spiritual Existence*.

Thus every individual contains all aspects of the whole of EXISTENCE, *from the grossest Physical to the subtlest Spiritual*, in a potential form. What is more, everyone can realize it with appropriate spiritual efforts (*Sādhanā*). And the *Upasanā* of OM is one of the chief and effective means of realizing it.

III. The OM as Auditory Symbol

OM IS primarily an auditory or SOUND-SYMBOL. It represents in a nutshell all the above Four Planes of the SUPREME INFINITE DIVINE REALITY, both Macrocosmically as well as Microcosmically, for purposes of meditation to help visualize and realize their unity in life. The symbolism is explained here briefly :—

All our experiences of entities and ideas in all the states of consciousness are represented by words, and words are made up of unit-sounds, such as are denoted by A to Z of the alphabet in English. With these sounds we form all our words and concepts. So A to Z can be in a way a symbol of the knowledge of the whole of Reality. For example, we say, 'He knows from A to Z of a particular thing'. But the English Roman alphabet and its arrangement is casual and unscientific, and its pronunciation and use in words is erratic.

In Sanskrit, each unit-sound is represented by a single definite letter and the pronunciation and spelling or name of the letter are the same. For example, in Sanskrit the consonant *K* with the vowel *a* added is pronounced as *Ka* and spelt also as *Ka* only ; whereas in

English we pronounce it as *Ka*, but spell as *Kay-Ye*. The Sanskrit alphabet is arranged in accordance with the order of origination of sounds from the opening of the mouth, passing through the throat from the larynx, and ending with the closing of the lips, by the contact of different parts of the mouth with the tongue. Between opening and closing of the mouth we produce all the words which represent all our experiences and concepts. When we open the mouth, we utter *A* (pronounced like *o* in *come*, and when we close the lips we utter *M* (again like *m* in *come*).[6] Thus between *A* and *M* are all the other sounds and words. Joining to them in the middle *U* (like *u* in *full*), which rolls through the throat over the whole tongue, we cover the entire beginning, middle and end of all words symbolically. In Sanskrit when *A* and *U* are combined, it gives us *O* sound as in *go*, and adding *M* to it we get the *OM*. Now the *A+U+M* known as the *Mātrā-s* (phonetic constituents) of OM, are symbolic not only of the beginning, middle and end of all the words, but of the Worlds (*Loka-s*) as well for meditation purposes. They represent the Three Planes of *Bhūh*, *Bhuvah*, and *Svah* and the correspond-

ing Microcosmic States. When *OM* is uttered mystically, the inarticulate humming sound that lingers (as after a gong is sounded), designated as the *Ardha-Mātrā* or *a-Mātrā* (half or non-mora), known also as the *Anāhata-dhvani*, represents the **Absolute** beyond the Worlds (*Lokottara*), the Fourth Plane (*Turīya*). Thus AUM is symbolic of entire EXISTENCE, Phenomenal as well as the Noumenal, Macrocosmic as well as Microcosmic, *Personal Ishvara* as well as *Impersonal Brahman.* Hence *OM* is considered as the designation of the INFINITE SUPREME DIVINE REALITY (*Tasya vāchakah pranavah*). and is held to be the holiest universal NAME. Hence *OM* is also characterized as *'Shabda-Brahman'* SOUND-BRAHMAN or *Brahman* in the form of SOUND OR THE WORD). OM being the Universal Cosmic Sound (the LOGOS), the totality of all sounds, it is also called PRANAVA (the primordial *Reverberating Sound* which fills the Universe), from which, modified as the *Ākasha* (Space / Matter), the universe evolves in stages. Often 'OM TAT SAT' *(Om That Existence or Reality)* is uttered to indicate the transcendental aspect of Divine Existence. Cf. *Om-Tat-Sat iti nirdesho Brahmanah trividhah smritah—Gītā*, XVII. 23.

IV. The OM as Visual Symbol

AS WRITTEN in the Sanskrit *Deva-Nāgarī* script for ritualistic and auspicious purposes, the figure of OM (given at the beginning of this booklet) is also a graphic symbol. The curve below in the figure, represents the *Bhūr-Loka* (the Lower Gross Plane); the curve above, the *Bhuvar-Loka* (the Upper Subtle Plane), and the curve projecting from the middle, like the trunk of an elephant, the *Svar-Loka* (the Causal Plane), whence the *Logos (Pranava)* issues forth reverberating as if from the trunk of an elephant. The small curve with the dot above the curved trunk, known as *Chandra-bindu*, signifies the semi-nasal sound as pronounced in Sanskrit. It represents the inarticulate lingering sound after a gong is sounded and stands for the *Absolute.* Words, and their concretized aspects Worlds, issue forth unceasingly from this *OM-kāra* (Sound-OM) like bubbles or waves in the sea.

This graphic symbol of OM was, in course of time, further concretized and personified for purposes of *Upāsanā* into the figure of the Deity GAJĀNANA (The Elephant Faced Deity—from *gaja* = elephant, *ānana* = face)

or *GAṄESHA* (the Lord of all *Bhūta-gana-s* or Cosmic Elements,—from *Īsha* = Lord or Ruler of the, [*bhūta* = element], *gana* = group) with all the holy and auspicious attributes and functions that were associated with OM from the Vedic times transferred to Him. His figure is a philosophic symbol to which suitable mythology was later invented to explain His figure popularly. We shall not go into the details of this highly interesting profound cosmic symbolism here, but only hint at the fact that His pot-belly represents that the whole *Brahmānda* is within Him, and He stands transcending it. The similarity of the elephant-face and the figure of the OM is quite evident. He easily rides or controls the troublesome *Māyā*, represented by the mischievous mouse. All this is in keeping with the Hindu tradition of symbolically concretizing and personifying abstract entities as already mentioned. Ganesha is often referred to as *OM-kāra-svarūpa* (of the form of *OM-kāra*). We may also note here that in the Hindu Pantheon all the Deities have animals as their vehicles, signifying divine powers controlling animal tendencies.

V. AUM and Spiritual Practice

TO HELP in Spiritual Practice *(Upāsanā)*, A-U-M, the phonetic constituents of OM, are identified with different types of Cosmic Triads, from the theistic to the philosophic and the mystic, for meditation purposes as per the need and development of the aspirant.[7] Further, OM being the PRANAVA (COSMIC-SOUND), the *Logos* in the Divine Mind where all the concepts of the universe and its entities arise and take shape into existent entities, by the mystic repetition of the OM, one attunes oneself to the Cosmic Mind and is lifted up spiritually. By connecting oneself mentally to the cosmic reservoir through *Upāsanā*, ones mind becomes a conduit for the flow of inspiration from the Cosmic Mind. Hence it is considered the holiest *Mantra* (Mystic Formula) for *Japa* (sacred repetition), and is added at the beginning of all other *Mantra-s* used for *Japa* as well.

Let us take two examples to see how the symbolism works psychologically :

1) The script we use for any language is nothing but an artificially contrived arbitrary

device, a set of symbols to record sounds. Still it helps us to store knowledge in books. One who knows the language well and has learnt the particular script, to him is opened up all the knowledge stored in all the books in that language, though he may need the help of the learned. Similarly, if one knows the symbolism of OM, and all the ideas it represents, to him is opened up all the Divine Knowledge, which he may realize with the help of a *Guru*.

2) Suppose we have forgotten the name of a person about whom we want to communicate to a friend. We begin to give various details and descriptions ; still it may not give an adequate or correct idea of the person. The friend's mind being in doubt, he does not feel any attraction to him. On the other hand, suppose we utter the name of a person, say Shri Ramakrishna. Immediately, in the mind of a person who has intimate knowledge about him, the cumulative effect of all his knowledge brings about a sense of love and reverence. Then, if the context needs, he may begin to recount all the details of that great life. Similarly, if a person has learnt all about

the Infinite Supreme Divinity, and that OM is ITs designation, as soon as he utters OM all the greatness of that Divinity and ITs wonderful manifestations come to his mind in a cumulative way and uplifts him. Then he may begin to contemplate on the details intensely and intimately, associating himself with IT. *This intimate intense contemplation is called UPĀSANĀ, which literally means 'sitting or placing oneself mentally near'* to the object of meditation. The psychological law is *'yat dhyāyati tat bhavati'* (whatever one meditates upon intensely that he becomes). The more one recalls the name of a person whom he loves, the nearer he feels to him, and the more clearly he visualizes him. Similarly. the more one repeats OM with the requisite attitude, the more one recalls the Infinite Supreme Divinity, and feels close to IT. Ultimately he realizes his essential identity with IT, since he is, as we saw, potentially the microcosmic counterpart of IT.

In ritualistic worship the identification of the macrocosm and microcosm is mentally visualized by a process called *Nyāsa* which consists of touching different parts of the body while uttering the words of the cosmic coun-

ter parts, and also in *Mānasa-pūjā* or Mental-Worship, when symbolic identification is mentally contemplated.

VI. The Gāyatrī-Mantra

THE GĀYATRĪ-MANTRA is the greatest prayer-Mantra which incorporates all the ideas of the AUM-symbolism and prays to the Supreme Infinite Divine Reality for the enlightenment of the Intelligence (DHĪ) *of all human beings* to enable them to realize the Supreme Truth. It is also known as the SĀVITRĪ-MANTRA since it is addressed to the Divine Person in the SUN, who is considered as the visible symbolic representation of the Supreme Divinity, for He destroys darkness and promotes life. (*cf. Isha Upanishad,* 15-16). *Sāvitrī* is from *Savitri (Savitā),* which means the Source or Originator of Universe, as well as the Sun. *Sāvitrī-Mantra* occurs in the Vedas (*Rig-Veda,* III. 62. 10), and is considered to be their very essence, or even their Mother (*Gāyatrī Veda-Mātā*). When later it was associated with OM, which is also considered as the Source of Vedas, and the *Gāyatrī* was

treated as its elaboration, OM was prefixed to it along with the three *Vyāhriti-s, representing the Three Cosmic Planes, Bhūr-Bhuvah-Svah* (Cf. *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad,* V. 14. 1-8 ; *Chhāndogya Upanishad,* II. 23. 2-3 ; III. 12).[8] The *Gāyatrī-Mantra* in full, repeated mystically, runs as follows :

> OM BHŪR-BHUVAH-SVAH,
> TAT-SAVITUH-VARENYAM
> BHARGO DEVASYA DHĪMAHI ;
> DHIYO YO NAH PRACHODAYĀT.

"OM, We meditate on the Divine Spiritual Effulgence of That Adorable Supreme Infinite Divine Reality, the Source of the Three Phenomenal World-Planes—the Gross or Physical (*Bhūh*), the Subtle or Psychical (*Bhuvah*), and the Potential or Causal (*Svah*), both Macrocosmically (Externally) and Microcosmically (Internally). May THAT SUPREME DIVINE BEING stimulate our intelligence so that we may realize the SUPREME TRUTH."

The *Gāyatrī-Mantra* is the most universal, non-personal, holy prayer which can be used

by any person belonging to any country, irrespective of race, religion, or sex. If one is a human being with intelligence that is qualification enough for repeating this *Prayer-Mantra.*

In course of time, just as the *OM-Kāra* was personified into Ganesha, the *Gāyatrī-Mantra* also was personified into the Goddess *Gāyatrī* (GĀYATRĪ-DEVĪ) for purposes of *Upāsanā.* The following verse is repeated in adoration as a *Dhyāna-shloka* (Meditational-verse) :

Muktā-vidruma-hema-nīla-dhavala-chchhāyaih-
mukhaih-tryakshanaih
Yuktām indu-nibaddha-ratnamukutām,
tattvārtha varṅatmikām ;
Gāyatrīm varadābhayānkusha-kashām,
shubhram-kapālam gadām,
Shankham-chakram-athāravinda-yugalam
hastaih-vahantīm bhaje.

(I adore the Goddess Gayatri, the embodiment of the *Varna-s* (letters) signifying the Supreme Truth, with Her five benign faces reflecting the hues of pearls, corals, gold, sapphire, and snow—each studded with three eyes (repre-

senting omniscience), whose head is adorned with a jewelled crown crested with the crescent-moon, whose two hands (out of ten) are in the pose of bestowing boons and fearlessness, and who in her other hands holds the goad, the whip, the white-skull, the mace, the conch, and the disc (as symbols of terror to the evil forces), and a pair of lotuses (as symbolizing purity, love, devotion, and detachment)."

(Cf. also *Devī-Māhātmya* or *Chandi* : I. 73-74 ; IV. 10)

VII. Importance of OM and the Gāyatrī

OM and the GĀYATRĪ-MANTRA have acquired such great importance that they are often referred to as THE PRANAVA and THE GĀYATRĪ. In the Vedas, Upanishads, the *Gītā,* and the later literature, there are numerous references to the holiness, importance, and significance of the *Pranava* and the *Gāyatrī.* The whole of the *Māndūkya Upanishad* is devoted to the delineation of the spirituo-philosophical significance of OM. Though the *Upanishad* contains only twelve verses, it is considered so important that numerous

commentaries are written on it. Shri Gauda-pāda-āchārya, the grand-Guru of shri Sankara-āchārya, has written an extremely subtle and revolutionary philosophical work called the *Māndūkya-Kārikā* to elucidate the highest philosophy of this *Upanishad* which establishes the supremacy of the Non-dual Reality (ADVAITA). Shri Shankarāchārya has commented on both the *Upanishad* and the *Kārikā*.

We shall give here a few of the important original quotations in translation from the Upanishads and the *Gītā* referring to the *Pranava* and the *Gāyatrī*. It must be remembered that just as when we say Krishna or Christ saves, it signifies the Person behind the name, OM too signifies the Infinite Brahman, OM being ITS universal Name (*Tasya vāchakah Pranavah*).

1. *KATHA UPANISHAD :* (I. 2. 15-17).

"The Goal which all Vedas proclaim, which all austerities and meditations *(Tapāmsi)* seek, and desiring which the sages lead the life of *Brahmacharya* (Continence)— I tell it to thee in brief— IT IS OM." (cf. *Gītā*, VIII. 11).

"This Immortal WORD (LOGOS) is verily Brahmā (the Personal Creator-God). This Im-

mortal WORD is verily also the Highest Brahman (Impersonal Divine Reality). Having understood this Immortal WORD, whatever one desires, one gets that."

"This Support (OM as a means of realizing Brahman) is the best; This Support is the Supreme. Knowing this Support (realizing the Truth signified by OM) one is exalted in the World of Brahmā."

2. *PRASHNA UPANISHAD* : (The whole of Section V. Some are quoted here—V. 2-5, 7.)

"What is OM, O Satyakāma, is verily the Higher or Transcendental (Impersonal) Brahman and the Lower or Phenomenal (Personal Creator-God) Brahmā. Therefore the Knower attains either of the two by this means."

"If one meditates upon only one of the three *Mātrā-s* (Moras) of OM, he comes back to this world very soon (after his death) being enlightened by that. The *Rik*-Hymns lead him to the World of Man, where he attains the greatness (in life) being endowed with Austerity *(Tapasyā)*, Continence (*Brahmacharya*), and Faith (*Shraddha*)."

"If again, one meditates upon two *Mātrā-s* one is united with the mind (after death). He is led to the World of the Moon (the Presiding Deity of mind) in the Intermediate Region by the *Yajus*-Formulas. And there in that World of Moon, having enjoyed its grandeur, comes back again."

"Again, he who meditates upon the *Supreme Purusha (Parameshvara)* with the Immortal Word OM, constituted of all the three *Mātrā-s,* becomes united with the effulgent Sun. He is freed from all sins, even as a snake is freed from its slough. He is led to the world of Brahmā by the *Sāma*-Chants. Then he beholds the Supreme Purusha residing in the Heart, higher than this highest totality of *Jīva-s* (Brahmā or Hiranyagarbha)."

"...Verily, with this OM-kāra (the *a-Mātrā*) as the Support, the Knower attains what is peaceful, undecaying, immortal, fearless, and Supreme (Atman/Brahman)."

3. *MUNDAKA UPANISHAD :* (II. 2. 3, 4, 6).

"Taking as bow the mighty Upanishadic weapon, fix on it the arrow sharpened by constant meditation. And having drawn it

to the full with the mind absorbed in ITs thought, penetrate that MARK—the IMMORTAL BRAHMAN."

"PRANAVA (the mystic Word OM) is the bow; the Soul within, the arrow; and Brahman, the target. One should hit that mark with an undistracted mind, and like the arrow, become one with IT."

"Where all the arteries meet like the spokes of a chariot-wheel in the hub—there within the psychic Heart He moves, becoming manifold. Meditate on that Self as OM. Godspeed to you in crossing to the farther shore beyond all darkness."

4. *MĀNDŪKYA UPANISHAD* : The entire upanishad is on OM, here briefly quoted :

"All this world is the Immortal Word OM. Its further explanation is this : the past, the present, the future, everything is just OM. And whatever transcends the three divisions of time—that, too, is just OM." (1)

"For verily, everything is Brahman. And this Self (Atman) within is Brahman. The Atman has four quarters (aspects)—Waking, Dream, and Deep-sleep States of Conciousness,

and *Turīya* or *Samādhi,* the Super-Conscious State." (2) ..."This Atman is to be identified with OM, when OM is considered as a single complete WORD. When OM is considered as composed of parts, the aspects of the Atman are to be identified with the parts, and the parts with the aspects. The parts of OM are A,U,M." (8) ..."The Immortal Word OM in its partless (i.e. inarticulate) aspect is the Fourth (*Turīya*)—the Transcendental, devoid of phenomenality, the Supreme Bliss, and Non-dual. Thus the WORD OM is verily the Self (Atman). He who knows this, with his self (*Jīva*) enters the SELF (ATMAN). (12).

5. *TAITTIRĪYA UPANISHAD :* (Whole of VIII *Anuvāka* in Chapter I, briefly quoted here).

"One should contemplate : OM is Brahman ; all this universe (perceived by the senses and intuited by the mind) is OM...A *Brāhmana* proceeding to recite the Veda intending 'Let me obtain the Veda' says OM. Assuredly he attains Brahman."

6. *CHHĀNDOGYA UPANISHAD* : (A few passages are quoted here. See also I. 1. 8-9 ; IV . 17. 1-3).

"Now, that which is *Udgītha* is verily *Pranava* and that which is *Pranava* is *Udgītha*. The yonder Sun is *Udgītha* and also *Pranava*, for He moves along pronouncing 'OM'." (I.5.1)

"Prajāpati (the Vedic Lord of Creation) brooded (made *Tapas* or meditated) on the Worlds. From them, thus brooded, issued forth the threefold Veda (as their essence). He brooded on this. From this, thus brooded upon, issued forth the Mystic *Syllables* (*Vyāhriti-s*) *Bhuh*, *Bhuvah*, and *Svah*. He brooded on them. From them, thus brooded upon, issued forth (as their essence) the Mystic Word OM. Just as all th: parts of the leaf are permeated by the ribs of the leaf, so are all words permeated by the OM-kāra. Verily, the OM-kāra is all this—yea, the OM-kāra is verily all this." (II. 23. 2-3)

"*Gāyatrī* indeed is all this, whatever being exists. Speech indeed is *Gāyatrī*; for speech indeed sings and removes fear of all this that exists...Such is the greatness of this (*Gāyatrī*). The Supreme Cosmic person (*Purusha*) is even greater than this. All this World is a quarter of Him, the other three quarters of His

constitute the Immortal Transcendent." (III. 12. 1 to 6 in brief).

7. *BRIHADĀRANYAKA UPANISHAD :*

See Section V. 14. 1-8, and VI. 3. 6 for ritualistic and meditational application of GĀYATRĪ.

8. *SHVETĀSHVATARA UPANISHAD :* (1. 1. 4).

"Making one's own body the lower piece of wood *(Arani)* and the *Pranava* the upper piece of wood (for purposes of rituals, fire is kindled by rubbing two pieces of holy wood or short sticks called *Arani-s)*, and practising churning in the form of meditation, one should realize the inherent Divine as one would find out something hidden (like fire in the *Arani-s*)."

9. *MAITRI UPANISHAD* (Also called *Maitreyi* or *Maitrāyani Upanishad)* (A few passages are quoted here. See also Section VI. 1, 4, 6, 8, 22-26, 34, 37 ; and VII. 5, 11).

"These two, the Spirit within and the Sun, go forth toward each other. One should reverence them with the WORD OM, with the

Mystic Utterances (*Vyāhriti-s*) *Bhūr, Bhuvah, Svah,* and with the *Sāvitrī (Gāyatrī)* prayer."

"There are, assuredly, two forms of Brahman : the formed and the formless. Now, that which is the formed is unreal ; that which is the formless is real, is Brahman, is Light. That Light is the same as the Sun. Verily, That came to have OM as its Soul (Atman). He divided Himself threefold. OM consists of three *Mātrā-s* (A+U+M). By means of these 'the whole World is woven warp and woof across Him.' For thus has it been said ; 'One should absorb oneself meditating that the Sun is Om." (VI. 2-3).

Various Triads of the forms of the Atman, worshipped by the use of the threefold OM.

"Now, it has elsewhere been said ; A, U, M is the threefold form of this Atman :

A, U, M (OM)	—This is the Sound-form
Feminine, masculine, and Neuter	—This is the Sex-form
Fire, Wind, and Sun	—This is Light-form
Brahmā, Rudra, and Vishnu	—This is the Lordship-form

Gārhapatya, Dakshināgni, and Āhavanīya-Sacrificial Fires	—This is the Mouth-form (Mouth of Gods)
Rig-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sāma-Veda	—This is Understanding-form
Bhūr, Bhuvah, Svah	—This is the World-form
Past, Present, Future	—This is the Time-form
Breath, Fire, and Sun	—This is Heat-form
Food, Water, and Moon	—This is the Swelling-form
Intellect, Mind, and Egoism	—This is the Intelligence-form
Prāna, Apāna, and Vyāna Breaths	—This is the Breath-form

Hence these are praised, honoured, and included by saying OM. For thus has it been said : 'This Immortal WORD OM, verily, O Satyakāma, is both the Transcendental and phenomenal Brahman.'." —(VI. 5).

Worship of the Atman in the form of the Sun by the use of the Sāvitrī-prayer

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Tat Savitur Varenyam (That Adorable Splendour of That *Savitri*—the Originator of the Universe) ;

'Yonder Sun, verily is Savitru (a visible symbol). He, verily, is to be sought thus by one seeking Atman'—say the expounders of Brahman.

Bhargo Devasya Dhīmahi (May we meditate upon That Splendour of the Divinity) ;

'Savitru, verily, is the Divinity. Hence upon that which is called His Splendour do I meditate'—say the expounders of Brahman.

Dhiyo yo nah Prachodayāt (And may He inspire our thoughts).

'Thoughts, verily, are meditations. And may He inspire these for us'—say the expounders of Brahman.

—(VI. 7 —in part).

SEE ALSO *NRISIMHA- PŪRVA-TĀPINI* and *UTTARA-TĀPINI* UPANISHADS ; and the *SĀVITRI UPANISHAD*.

10. *THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ*.

'Pranavah sarva-Vedeshu'—'I am the OM in all the Vedas' (VII. 8).

'Controlling all the senses, confining the mind in the Heart, drawing up the *Prāna-Vāyu* (through the *Sushumnā*) towards the head

(Sahasrāra), and thus occupied in the practice of *yoga*, he who departs from the body uttering the one-syllabled "OM" denoting Brahman, and meditating on Me, attains the Supreme Goal.' (VII. 12-13).

'Pavitram-Om-Kārah'—"I am the Holy WORD OM"—(1X. 17)

'Of Sāman-s also I am the Brihat-Sāman, of metres GĀYATRĪ am I." (X. 35)

'OM, TAT, SAT', this has been declared to be the triple designation of Brahman. By that were made of old the Brāhmana-s, the Vedas, and the Yajna-s. Therefore, uttering 'OM' are the acts of sacrifice, gift, and austerity, as enjoined in the ordinances, always begun by the followers of the Vedas. (XVII. 23-24).

· (For the use of TAT (THAT Supreme Reality) and SAT (Supreme Existence) see the verses XVII. 25-28).

MAHĀNĀRĀYANA UPANISHAD ON OM AND GĀYATRĪ

"The One-syllable 'OM' is *Brahman*. Agni is its Deity. Its Rishi also is Brahman. Its metre is Gāyatrī. Its application is for the union with *Paramātman*. (Section XXXIII).

"May the Boon-confering Divine Gāyatrī come to us (to instruct us about) the Imperishable Brahman who is revealed by the Vedanta. May Gāyatrī, the Mother of Metres, favour us with the Knowledge of the Supreme Brahman." (XXXIV).

"O Gāyatri, Thou art the Vigour, Thou art the Stamina, Thou art the Strength, and Thou art the Brilliance in all. Thou art the origin and sustenance of Gods. Thou art the Universe and its duration. Thou art all that exist and their span of life. Thou surpassest everything. Thou art the TRUTH denoted by the *Pranava*. I invoke Thee as Gāyatrī (Giver of Illumination); I invoke Thee as Sāvitrī (Giver of Life); I invoke Thee as Sarasvatī (Giver of Knowledge and Wisdom); ......" (XXXV. I).

"*OM Bhūh, OM Bhuvah, OM Svah; OM mahah* (the Region of Spiritual Light); *OM Janah* (the place of Origin of Universes); *OM Tapah* (the Region of Higher Knowledge); *OM Satyam* (the Abode of Truth). OM, May we meditate on the Adorable Splendour of That Supreme Divine Source of All to quicken our understanding. OM, IT is the Causal Waters, Light, Bliss, Ambrosia, Brahman, and also the Three Worlds. All these are verily OM." (XXXV. 2).

NOTES

1. In ordinary usage *Ashvattha* is a tree belonging to the fig variety. It grows up to a very huge size, but its berries are very small. Its leaves have long stalks and hence the leaves are constantly in movement with the slightest breeze, when other trees are still. Probably this has earned it the name *Ashvattha*. Consequently it has served as a symbol of religio-philosophical significance. It is also a very hardy tree and, like the ego, it is very difficult to eradicate. It grows anywhere, and even if a little of the root is left, it sprouts up again. Because of its religio-philosophical association, it is considered a holy tree, and is often seen in the villages with a platform around it with some holy images at its base. Being a huge spreading tree, the village meetings, school, etc. are also held under the shade of the *Ashvattha* tree.

2. "All these creatures, my dear, have *BEING* (SAT) as their *root*, have *BEING* as their *abode*, and have *BEING* as their *support*."

3. This is the idea underlying the concept of *Adhishthāna-Devatā-s* (Presiding-Deities) , the Luminous (*Deva* from *Div*, to shine) Cosmic counterparts of the various faculties, arts, and sciences, etc., in the Hindu tradition and thought. These Luminous Devatā-s, formless but conscious, like the mind, were later on endowed with concrete personified philosophic-mythological forms for purposes of adoration and worship *(Upāsanā)*. This tendency to concretize and personify the abstract

and the formless is a uniquely special feature of Hindu tradition from the Vedic times to the present day in all fields of life—especially in the religious and aesthetic fields. (Cf. the Seasons, and the *Rāga-s* and *Rāginī-s* of music, personified in art and painting). The Devatā-s were step-by-step raised higher and higher and ultimately identified with the *Ultimate Supreme Divine Reality,* of which they are but aspectual expressions.

4. a) "The Illumined Sages *(Sūrayah)* constantly see that Infinite All-pervading Supreme Reality *(Vishnu)* without any obstruction as though their vast eye (vision) was spread out in the Spiritual Sky."

b) "This Atman, hidden in the Hearts of all beings, is not ordinarily revealed to all ; but it is verily revealed to the subtle and pointed (concentrated) intellect of the sages who are trained in perceiving subtle objects."

5. Just as the *Brahmānda* has Fourteen Cosmic Worlds or *Loka-s,* the body also has correspondingly Fourteen Microcosmic Subtle Psychic-Centres called CHAKRA-s or LOTUS-es, arranged along the spine at different levels, roughly indicated by the various plexuses. However, these *Chakra-s* are located in the subtle-body and six of them are well known as the *Shat-Chakra-s.* Though the *Shat-Chakra-s* are well-known, there are other *Chakra-s* as well. See, *The Serpent Power* by Sir John Woodroffe. V. S. Apte in his *The Practical Sanskrit English Dictionary,* quotes, under the word *Nādī, Mālatī-Mādhava,* 5. 1, 2 : *Shat-adhika-dasha nādī-Chakra*

madhya-sthita-ātmā—The Atman abiding in the midst of the sixteen *Nādī-Chakra-s*. When one's Psychic Energy (*Prāna-Vāyu)* is raised along the central Psychic-Channel *(Sushumnā-Nādī)* in the spine (*in the subtle-body)*, from bottom upwards, through appropriate *Sādhanā* (Spiritual Practice) and attuned to any of these subtle Centres, one gets the corresponding Cosmic experience, just as when we tune the radio to different wave-lengths, we get the programmes being broadcast from different places in the world on those wave-lengths,

6. That is why we find babies everywhere use sounds like Ammā, Mum, etc. for mother. Hence Ammā or Ambā (*b* also being a labial, like *b* in *but*) is the most universal natural sound or name for the 'Divine Mother' or SHAKTI (DIVINE ENERGY), the Source of all phenomenal Existence.

7. Given here are some Triads that are, and can be, identified with the *Mātrā-s* of OM and the *Ardha-Mātrā* or *A-Mātrā* (*Turīya)—A-U-M....*—for purposes of *Upāsanā :* The list is not exhaustive. One may improvise according to the needs of one's *Sādhanā*.

Object of Meditation	A	U	M	Turiya ....
Reality	Satyam	Jnanam	Anantam	Brahman/Atman
"	Sat	Chit	Ananda	Brahman/Atman
Paramatman	Virat	Hiranya-garbha	Ishvara	Brahman/Atman
Jivatman	Vishva	Taijasa	Prajna	Brahman/Atman

Object of Meditation	A	U	M	Turiya
Trinity and Cosmic Functions,	Brahma (Evolution of Universe) (Srishti)	Vishnu (Protection of Universe) (Sthiti)	Shiva/Rudra (Involution of Universe) (Pralaya)	Parameshvara Non-Dual Peace Shantam-Advaitam
& Their Consorts	Sarasvati (Wisdom)	Lakshmi (Wealth)	Parvati(Kali) (Power)	Devi or Parameshvari
Universe	Bhuh	Bhuvah	Svah	Lokottara
Body (Sharira)	Gross (Sthula)	Subtle (Sukshma)	Causal (Karana)	Incorporeal-Atman
Guna-s	Sattva	Rajas	Tamas	Trigunatita
Power or Shakti	Prakriti	Avyakta	Maya	Brahman/Atman
Framework of Universe	Space	Time	Causation	Transcendental Absolute
Time	Present	Past	Future	Absolute
States of Consctous-ness	Jagrat (waking)	Svapna (Dream)	Sushupti (Deep-sleep	Samadhi (Tuirya) (Superconscious Trance)
Samsara	Rebirth	Life	Death	Mukti(Liberation)
Vedas	Rik	Yajus	Sama	Aum
Sound	Vaikhari	Madhyama	Pashyanti	Para

8. As already pointed out, the sound OM is produced by the combination of the three sounds A,U,M. These are the three *Mātrā-s* (Moras or phonetic components) of OM ; further there is the *Ardha-Mātrā* (half-mora) or

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Power or Shakti	Prakriti	Avyakta	Maya	Brahman/Atman
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the inaudible sound which still lingers even when the audible sound dies away, and which can be detected only by fine perception and concentration.

OM being the sound-symbol of Brahman, it is considered to be the first sound produced at the beginning of creation. From the three *Mātrā*-s of OM came out the three 'feet' of *Gāyatrī*. (The *Sāvitrī-Mantra* verse is in ***Gāyatrī*** metre and the 'feet' refer to its parts. Since the verse has become very famous and holy, it has become well known as *the Gāyatrī*, just as *Gītā* means song; but since the *Bhagavad-Gītā* became very famous, it is referred to as *The Gita*). And from its three 'feet' came out the three Vedas and the three *Vyāhriti-s, Bhūr-Bhuvah-Svah,* representing the three Cosmic World-Planes. From *A,* came out *'Tat Savitur-varenyam'*, which expanded itself into the *Rig-Veda* and the Cosmic Plane *Bhūh*; from *U, 'Bhargo Devasya Dhīmahi'*, which expanded itself into *Yajur-Veda* and the Plane of *Bhuvah*; and from *M, 'Dhiyo yo nah prachodayāt',* which expanded itself into *Sāma-Veda*, and the Plane of *Svah*. The first Veda is *Stuti-para* (devoted to Devotion), the second is *Kriyā-para* (devoted to Work), and the third is *Jnāna-para* (devoted to Knowledge).

So by the meditation upon the different *Mātrā-s* different ends are attained acording to the significations of the *Mātrā-s*, But when the mind is concentrated upon the *Ardha-Mātrā*, the Transcendental Brahman is realized.

VIVEKANANDA ON VEDA, OM, AND THE UNIVERSE

"VEDA is of the nature of *Shabda* or *Idea*. It is but the sum total of ideas. *Shabda*, according to the old Vedic meaning of the term, is the *subtle idea* which reveals itself by taking the gross form later on. So owing to the dissolution of the creation, the subtle seeds (ideas) of the future creation become involved in the Veda...... Supposing this jug breaks into pieces, does the idea of a jug become null and void? No. Because, the jug is the gross effect, while the idea 'jug' is the subtle state, o
the *Shabda*-state of the jug. In the same way, the *Shab*
state of every object is its *Subtle State*, and the t
we see, hear, touch, or perceive in any manner,
gross manifestations of entities in the subtle
state. Just as we may speak of the effect an
even when the whole creation is annihilate
as the consciousness of the universe or th
of all concrete things, exists in Brah
At the point of creative manifestati
causal entities vibrates into act
being the sonant material sub
nal primal sound 'OM' contin
ously. And then from the c
the subtle image, or *Sh*
thing and then its gross
Shabda or world-c
the VEDA."......

"At the poi
as SHABDA
'Nāda' or '
das or id
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... overleaf)

"When the mind proceeds towards self-absorption in Brahman, it passes through all these stages one by one to reach the Absolute (*Nirvikalpa*) state at last. In the process of entering into *Samadhi*, first the universe appears as one mass of ideas ; then the whole thing loses itself in a profound 'OM'. Then even that melts away, even that seems to be between being and non-being. That is the experience of the eternal NĀDA. And then the mind becomes lost in the Reality of Brahman, and then it is done ; All is PEACE."



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